



Lenin underground, disguised, mid-1917

## The State and Revolution

Lenin's "[The State and Revolution](#)" is a classic of classics. Not only is it an original work in itself, but it also revisits a string of other major Marxist classics. We will take Chapters [Two](#) and [Three](#) of this, Lenin's most extraordinary work, as our main text (attached; download linked below).

“The State and Revolution” was written after April, and before October, 1917, between two revolutions and in a time of furious class struggle, during which Lenin was in hiding for part of the time. The book certainly shows what was on Lenin’s mind in between the two Russian revolutions of 1917.

In the first line of Chapter 2 of “The State and Revolution” Lenin describes “[The Poverty of Philosophy](#)”, written in 1847 when Marx was still in his twenties, as “the first mature works of Marxism,” - or in other words, as a classic.

Lenin moves on to the classic [Communist Manifesto](#), where he immediately derives the term “dictatorship of the proletariat” from the equally direct words of Marx and Engels in the Manifesto, namely: *“the state, i.e. the proletariat organised as the ruling class”*.

*“The state is a special organization of force: it is an organization of violence for the suppression of some class.”* In other words, the proletariat will use its state to suppress the bourgeois class.

Lenin then turns on the reformists. In the first paragraph of the third part of Chapter 3, Lenin calls the anarchists and the petty-bourgeois opportunists “twin brothers” (*“anarcho-syndicalism... is merely the twin brother of opportunism”*). At this point in Chapter 2 he writes:

*“The petty-bourgeois democrats, those sham socialists who replaced the class struggle by dreams of class harmony, even pictured the socialist transformation in a dreamy*

*fashion — not as the overthrow of the rule of the exploiting class, but as the peaceful submission of the minority to the majority which has become aware of its aims. This petty-bourgeois utopia, which is inseparable from the idea of the state being above classes, led in practice to the betrayal of the interests of the working classes.”*

Chapter 2 proceeds to touch “[The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte](#)”. It returns to Marx on the dictatorship of the proletariat, this time in those very words, in a letter written in 1852; and Lenin says: ***“Only he is a Marxist who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”***

Marx’s classic work “[The Civil War in France](#)” was written during, and immediately after, the events of early 1871 in Paris. Lenin’s summary of Marx, as usual, is brief. It misses very little and cannot easily be beaten. We will note its highlights here.

The first is where Lenin writes that Marx would have made a correction to the [Communist Manifesto](#) of 1848 on the basis of the experience of the Paris Commune. In 1871 Marx wrote: *“...the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes”* - by which he meant that proletariat had to *“to smash the bureaucratic-military machine”* and to replace it with a state that is *“the proletariat organized as the ruling class”* and as an *“armed people”* that had disbanded the bourgeoisie's *“special bodies of armed men”*.



**October 1917**

Lenin wrote:

*“Marx did not indulge in utopias; he expected the experience of the mass movement to provide the reply to the question as to the specific forms this organisation of the proletariat as the ruling class would assume and as to the exact manner in which this organisation would be combined with the most complete, most consistent ‘winning of the battle of democracy.’”*

The Commune was *“a practical step that was more important than hundreds of programmes and arguments.”* Lenin proceeds in the second and third sections of this chapter to relate how the practical steps were executed.

In the fourth part, Lenin addresses the question of centralism, and clearly shows that centralism is not imposed but must be won politically, as a matter of free-willing action. All the time, Lenin is carrying on a secondary argument against the “opportunists” and the “anarchists”, whom, as we noted, he says are “twin brothers.” Lenin writes:

*“The anarchists dismissed the question of political forms altogether. The opportunists of present-day Social-Democracy accepted the bourgeois political forms of the parliamentary democratic state as the limit which should not be overstepped; they battered their foreheads praying before this 'model', and denounced as anarchism every desire to break these forms.”*

*“...now one has to engage in excavations, as it were, in order to bring undistorted Marxism to the knowledge of the mass of the people,”* says Lenin.

As it was in 1917, so it remains in 2015. One has to engage in excavations.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The State and Revolution, Chapters 2 and 3, 1917, Lenin.](#)
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